

Traci Sorell • Illustrated by Madelyn Goodnight

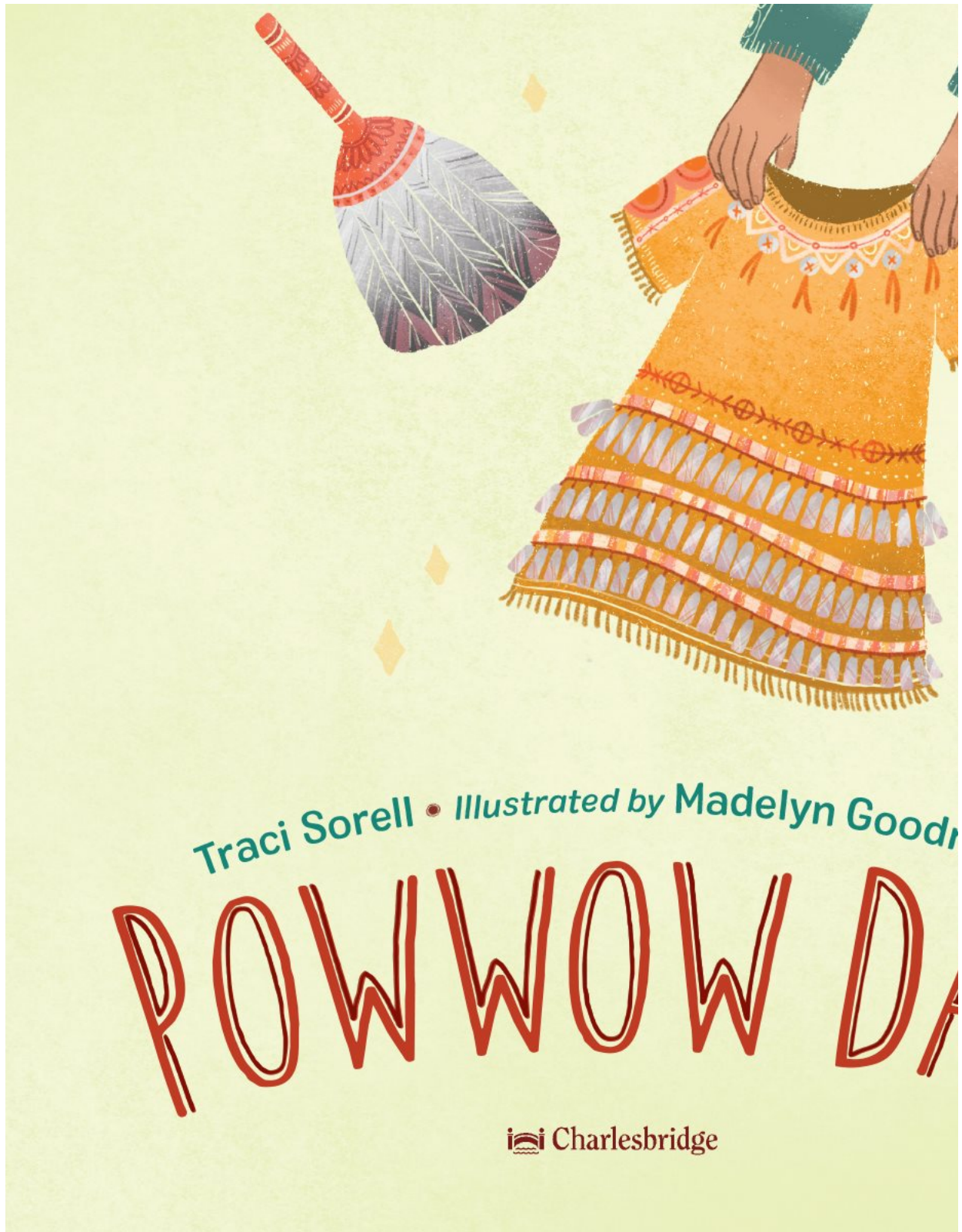
ROWWOW DAY



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ROWWOW DA





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ROWWOW D

 Charlesbridge

**For Liz, Cierra, and others who returned to the circle,
and in memory of those who could not—T. S.**

**To my wonderful family, who taught me what
unconditional love and support mean—M. G.**

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very ill and weak, River cannot join in the dancing
tribal powwow, she can only watch from the sideli
sister and cousins dance the celebration—but as th
beats she finds the faith to believe that she will rec
dance again.

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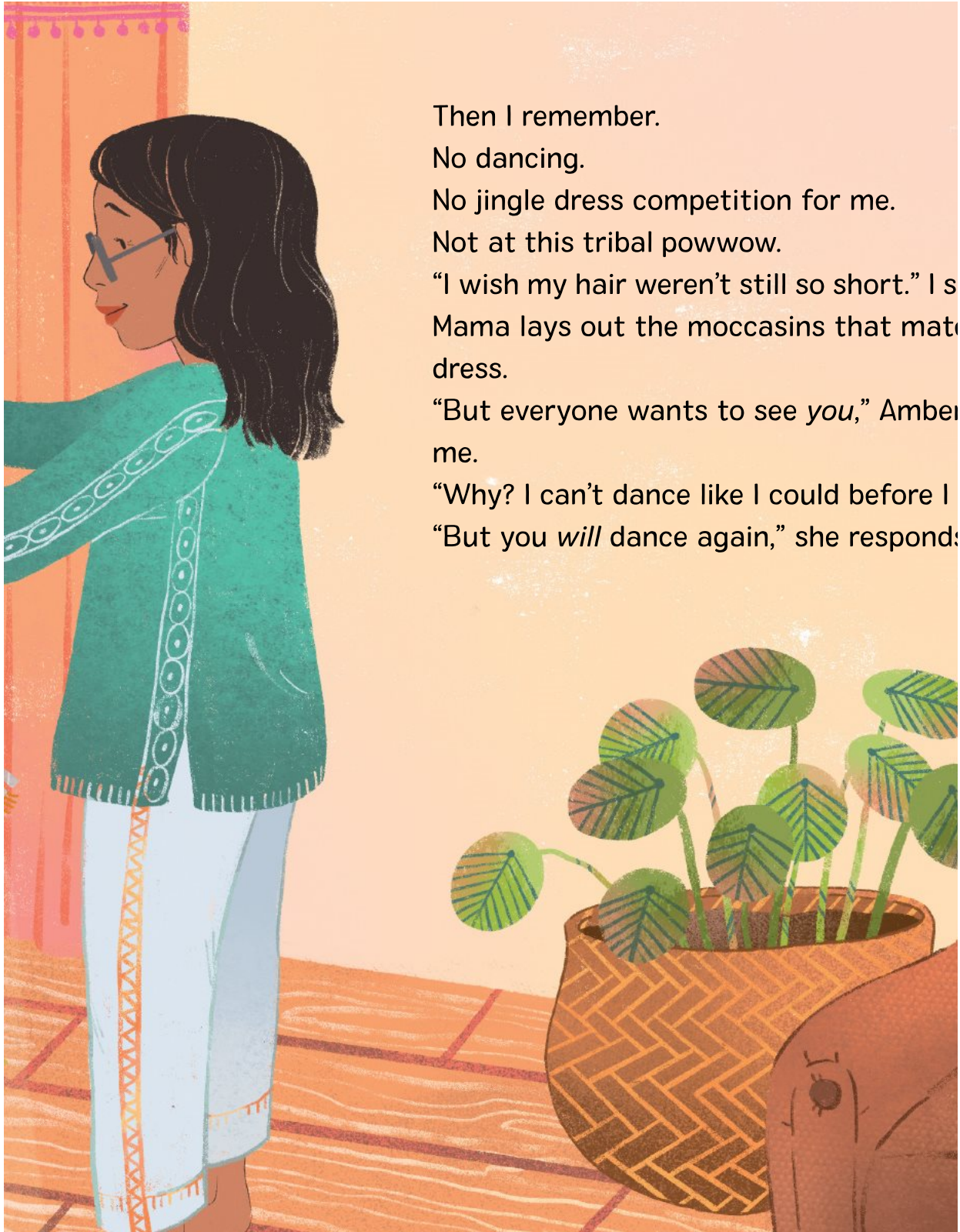
“River, wake up,” Amber whispers.

My eyes open.

Today is powwow day!







Then I remember.

No dancing.

No jingle dress competition for me.

Not at this tribal powwow.

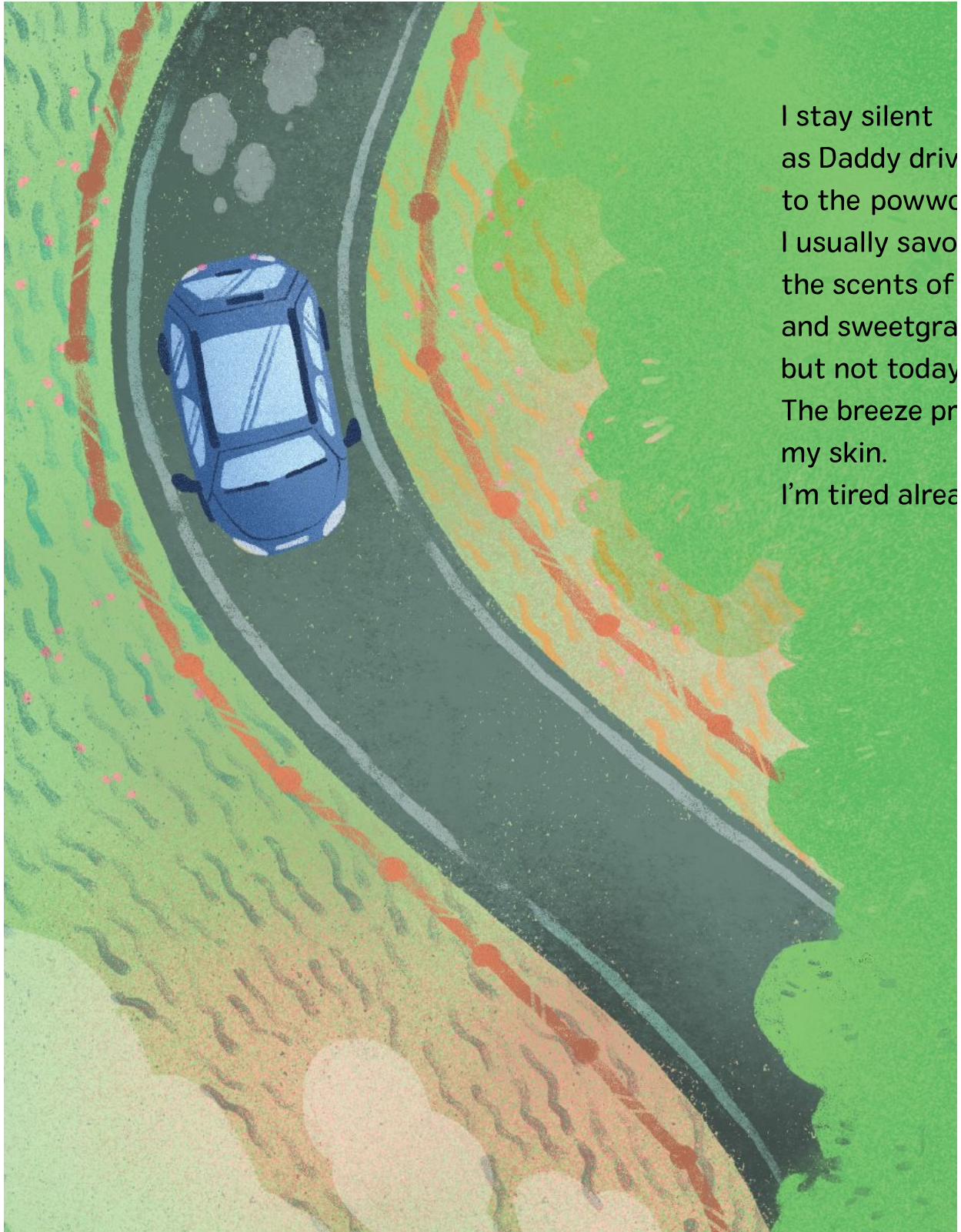
"I wish my hair weren't still so short." I say.

Mama lays out the moccasins that match my dress.

"But everyone wants to see *you*," Amber says to me.

"Why? I can't dance like I could before I was hurt."

"But you *will* dance again," she responds.



I stay silent
as Daddy drives
to the power
I usually save
the scents of
and sweetgrass
but not today
The breeze pr
my skin.
I'm tired already

Daddy arranges our chairs

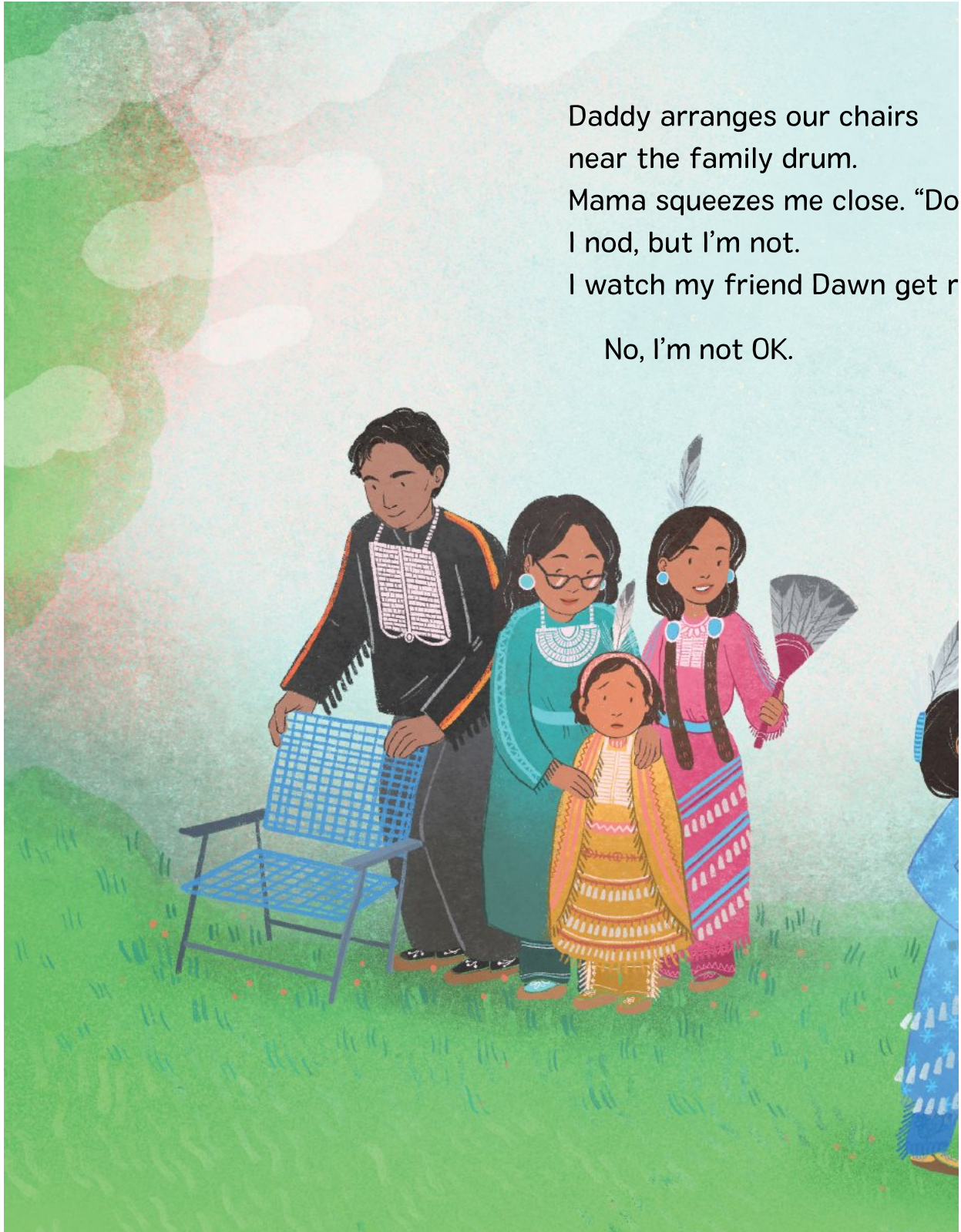
near the family drum.


Mama squeezes me close. "Do

I nod, but I'm not.

I watch my friend Dawn get r

No, I'm not OK.



An illustration of a Native American powwow scene. In the foreground, a hand holds a drumstick, striking a drum with a red and white geometric pattern. To the left, a person wears a large feathered headdress with orange, blue, and white feathers. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with green hills and a yellow sky. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

Then the powwow begins
as the emcee calls,
“Time for Grand Entry—stand up.
Gentlemen, remove your hats.”
My uncles strike
a large drum together.

BAM. BAM. BAM. E

They sing,
“EH-yah,
EH-yah,
WEY-eh-yah-ah.”



I make a decision.
“At least I can dance Grand Entry.”
“You *sure*?” Amber asks.
“Yup.”

Grandpa leads with the eagle staff.
Other warriors carry flags into the arena.

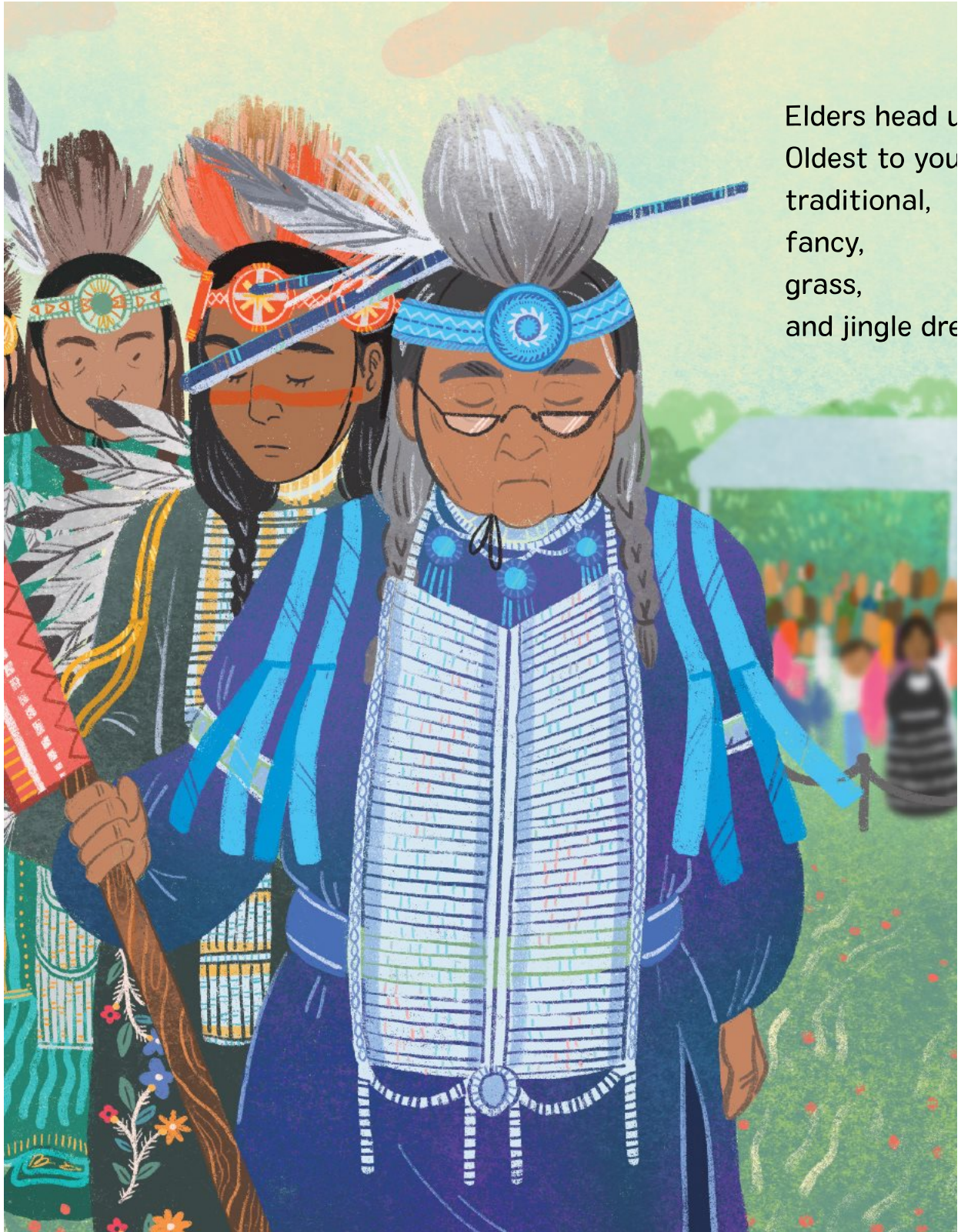
BAH-dum.

BAH-dum.

BAH-dum.

BAH-dum.

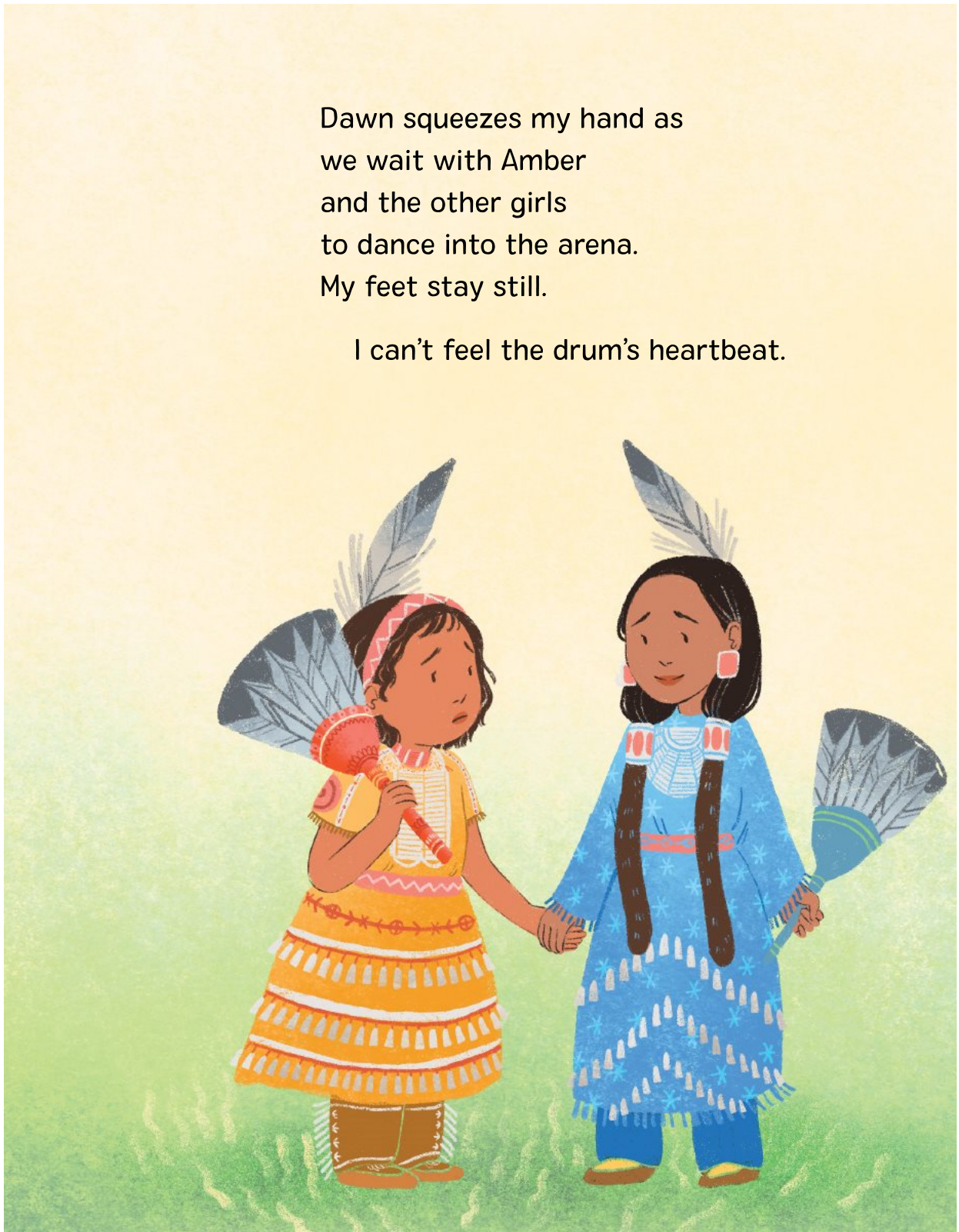




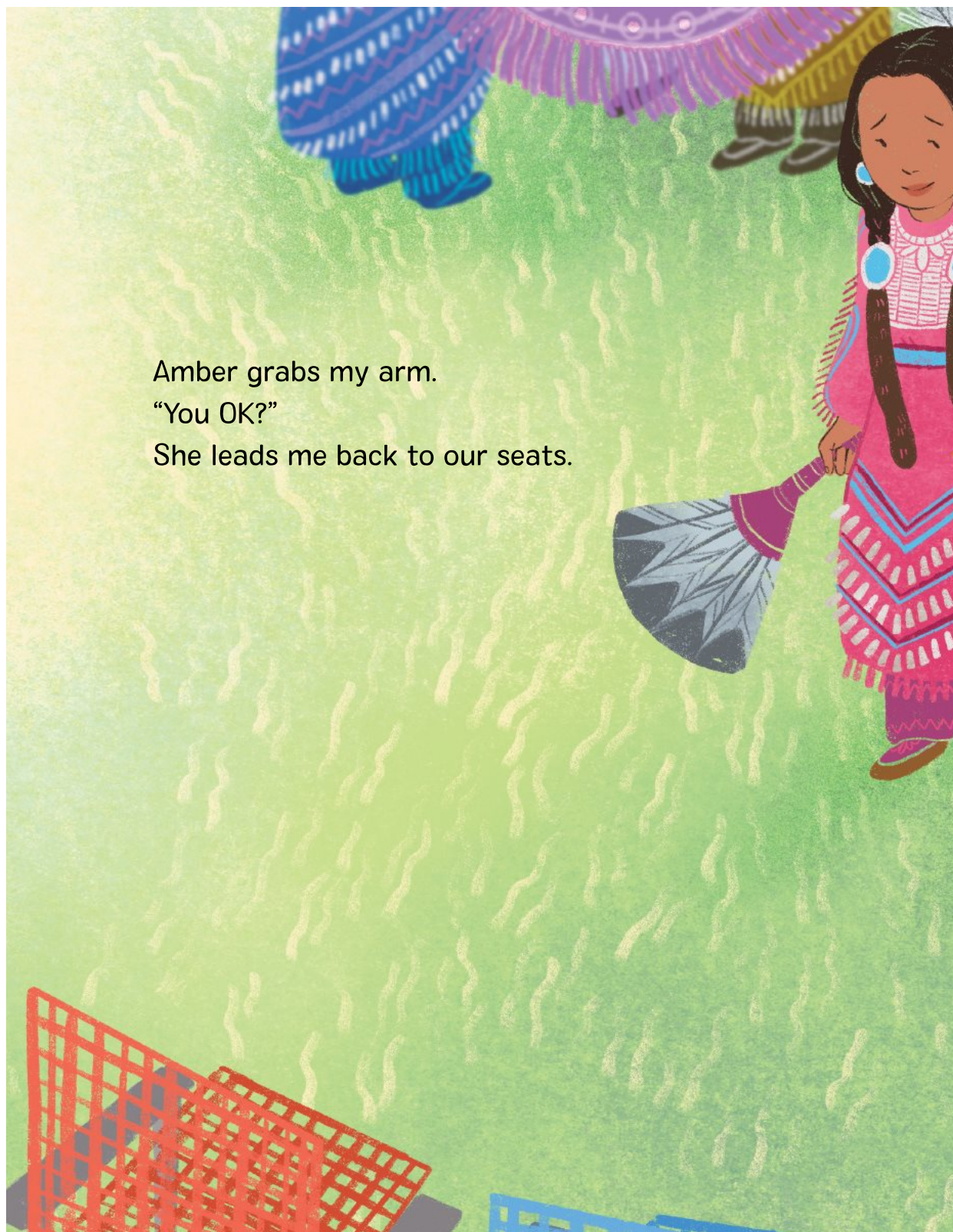
Elders head u
Oldest to you
traditional,
fancy,
grass,
and jingle dre

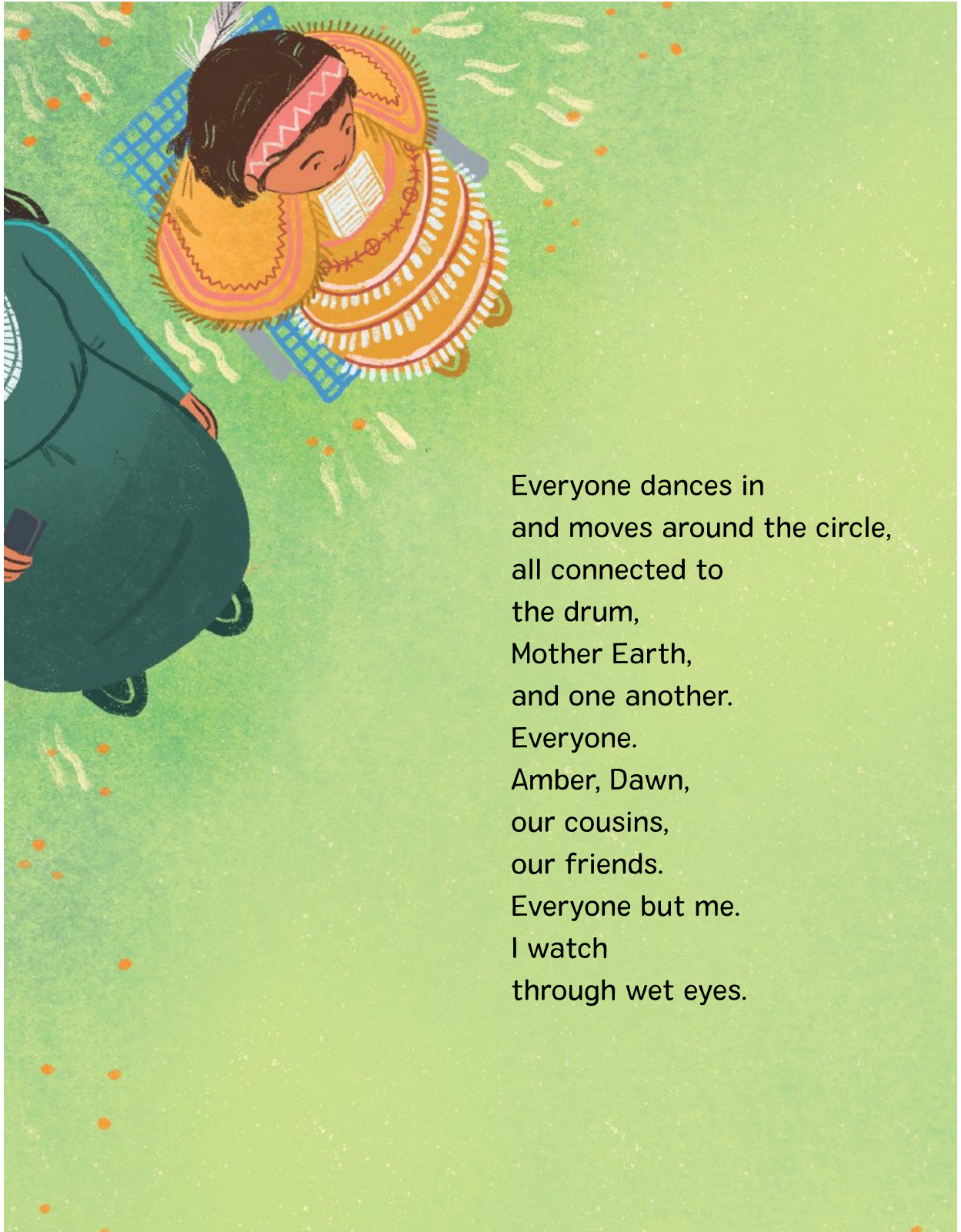
Dawn squeezes my hand as
we wait with Amber
and the other girls
to dance into the arena.
My feet stay still.

I can't feel the drum's heartbeat.



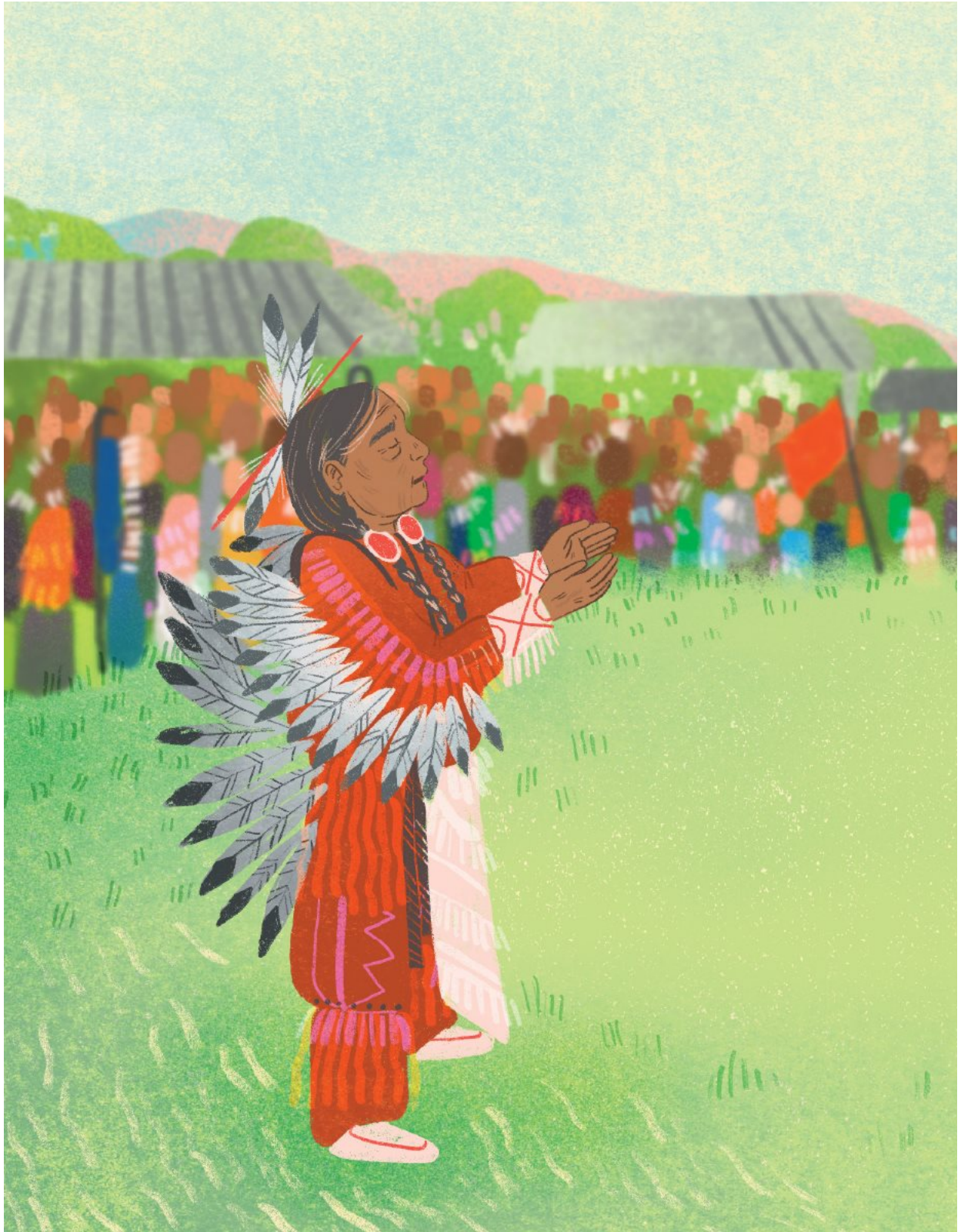
Amber grabs my arm.
“You OK?”
She leads me back to our seats.

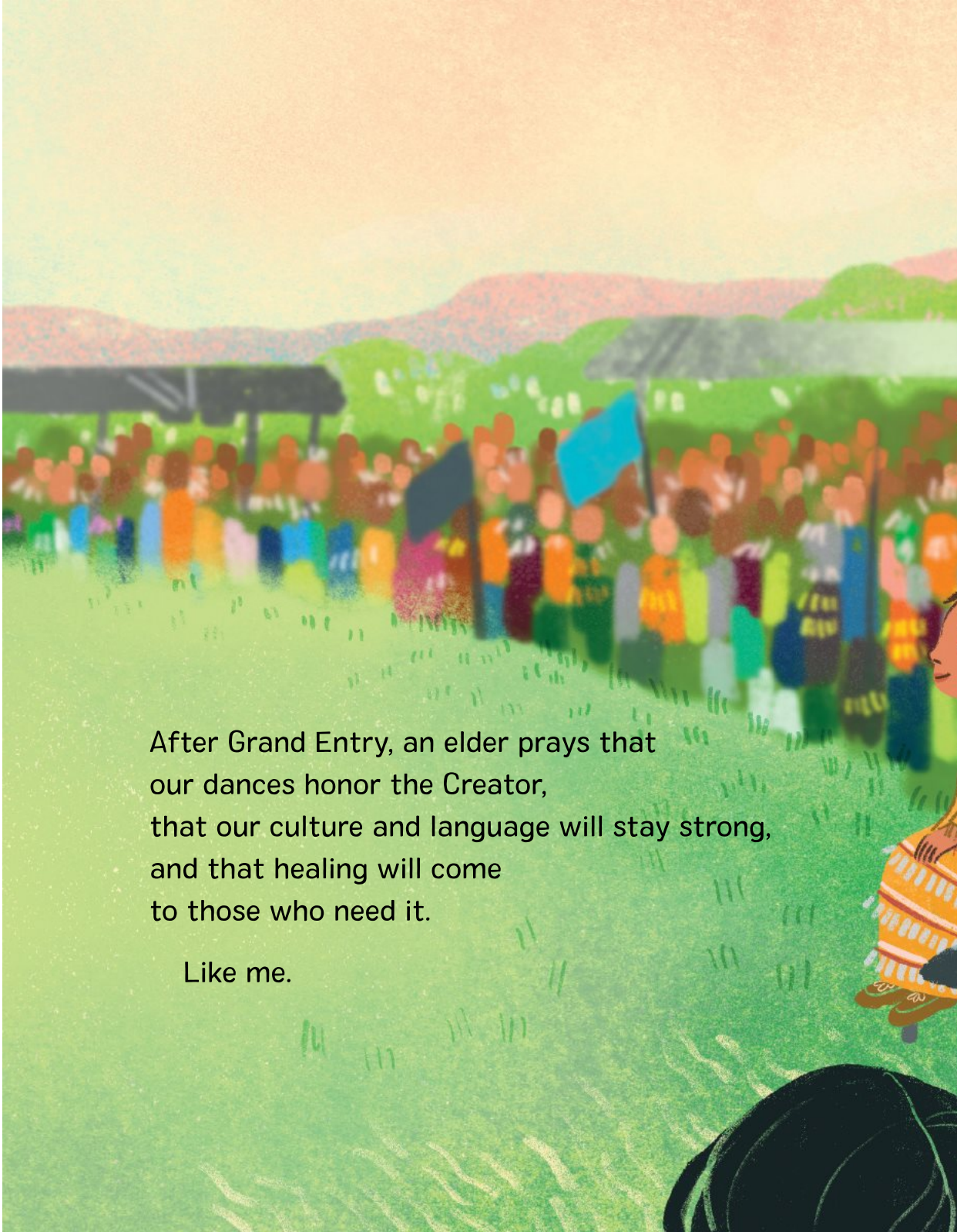




Everyone dances in
and moves around the circle,
all connected to
the drum,
Mother Earth,
and one another.
Everyone.
Amber, Dawn,
our cousins,
our friends.
Everyone but me.
I watch
through wet eyes.

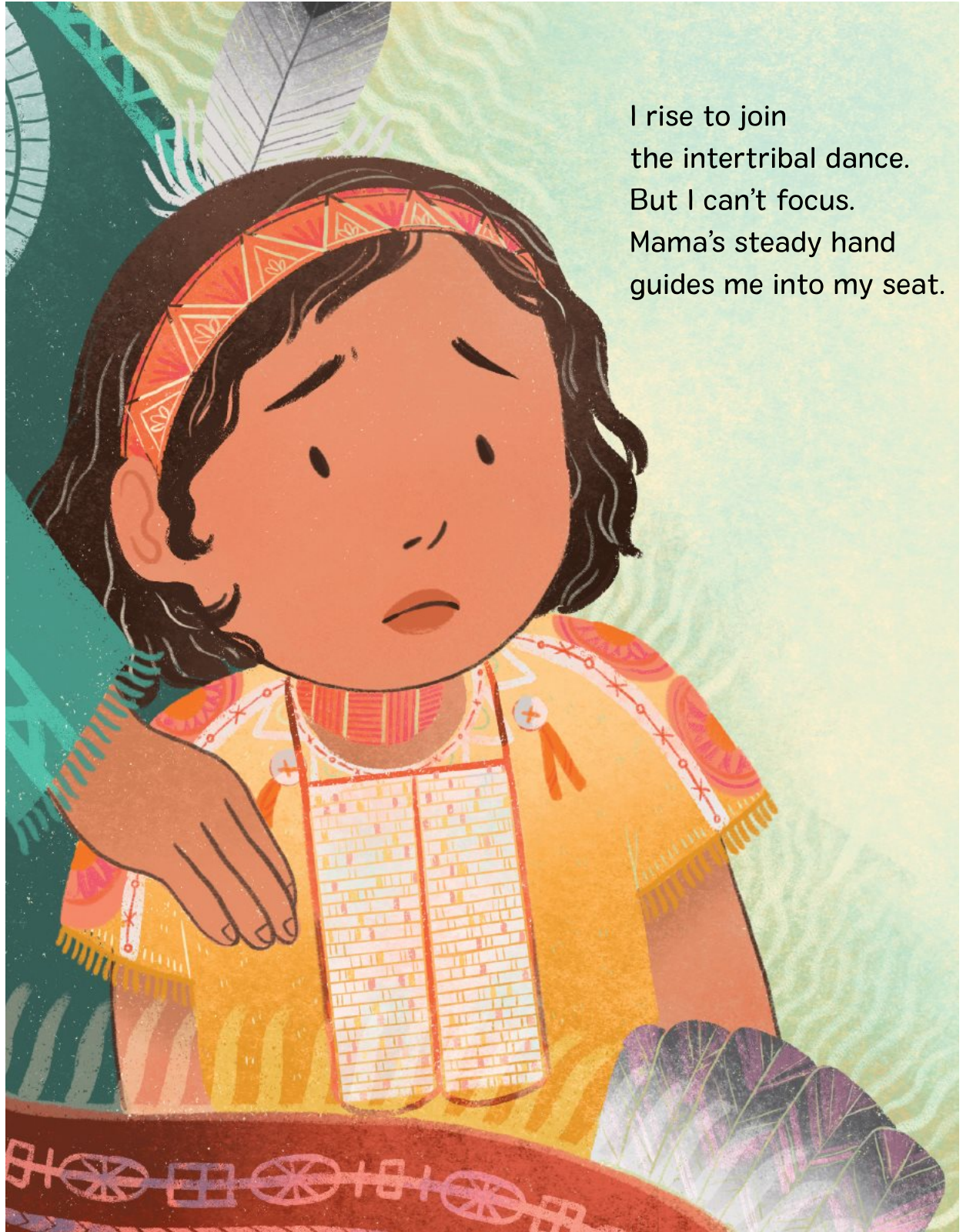




A vibrant, stylized illustration of a large crowd of people gathered in a green field. The people are depicted as colorful, rounded figures in various colors like orange, blue, green, and purple. Some are holding flags, including a prominent blue one. In the background, there are rolling hills in shades of green and pinkish-red under a soft, orange-hued sky. The overall style is painterly and celebratory.

After Grand Entry, an elder prays that
our dances honor the Creator,
that our culture and language will stay strong,
and that healing will come
to those who need it.

Like me.



I rise to join
the intertribal dance.
But I can't focus.
Mama's steady hand
guides me into my seat.

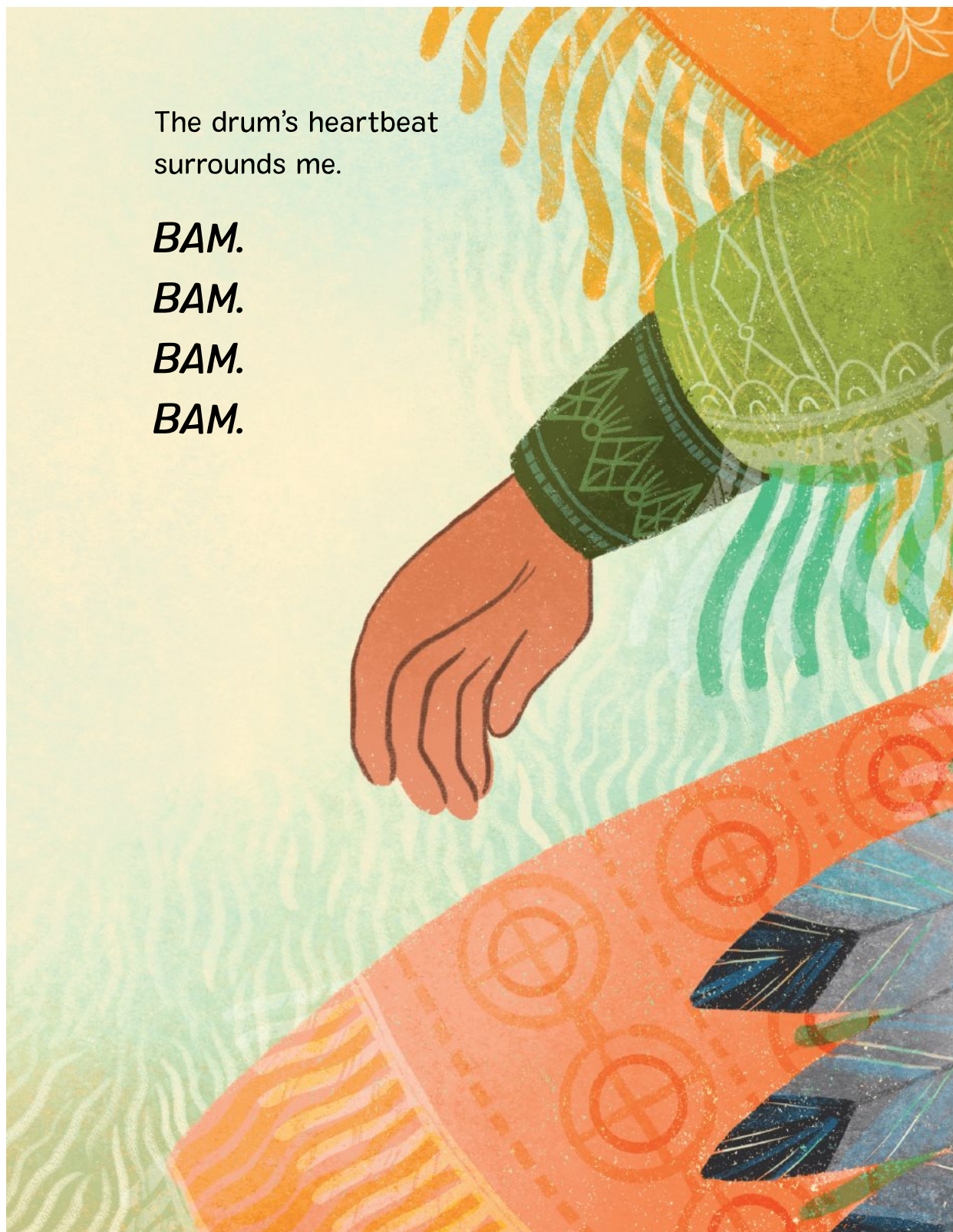
The drum's heartbeat
surrounds me.

BAM.

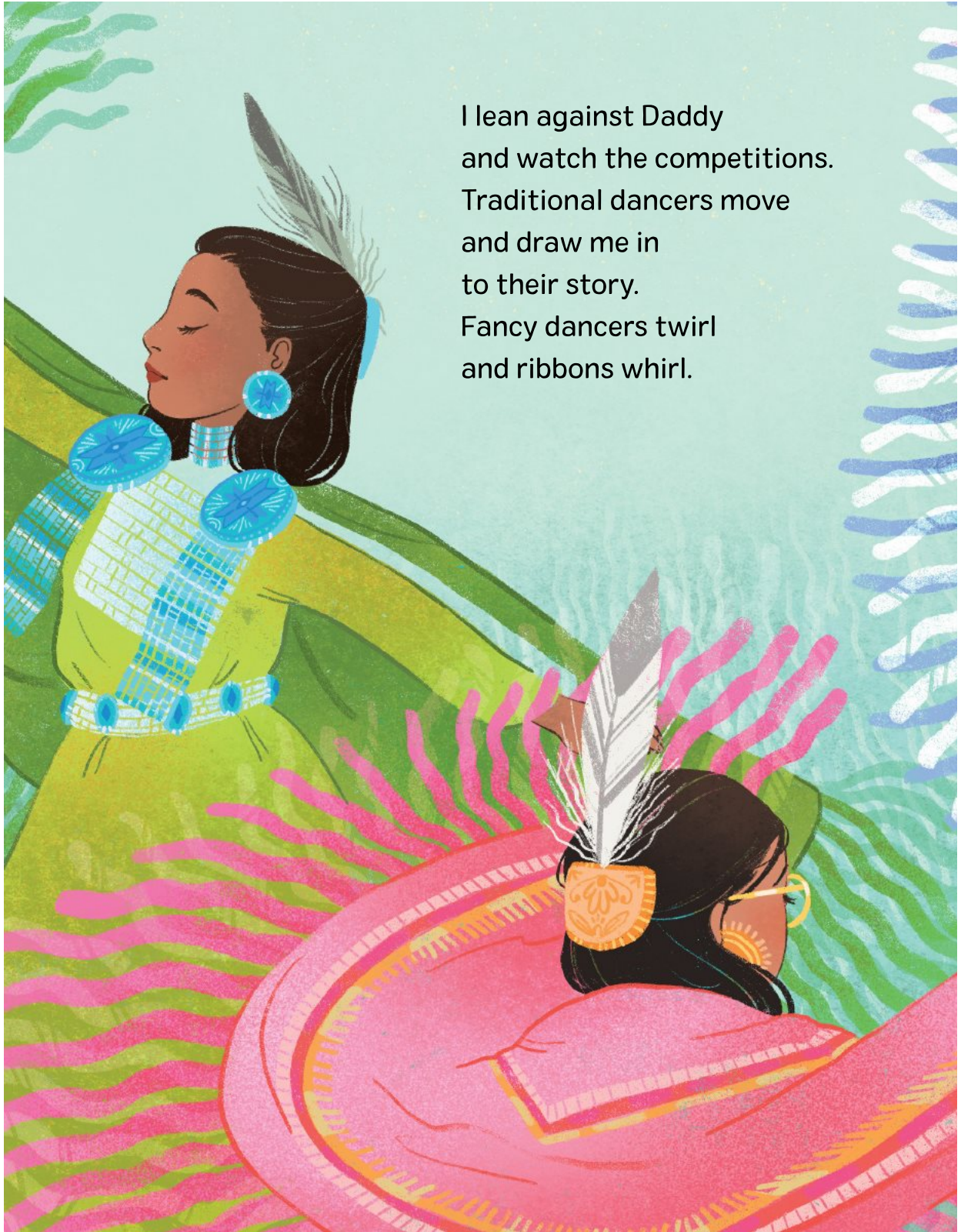
BAM.

BAM.

BAM.



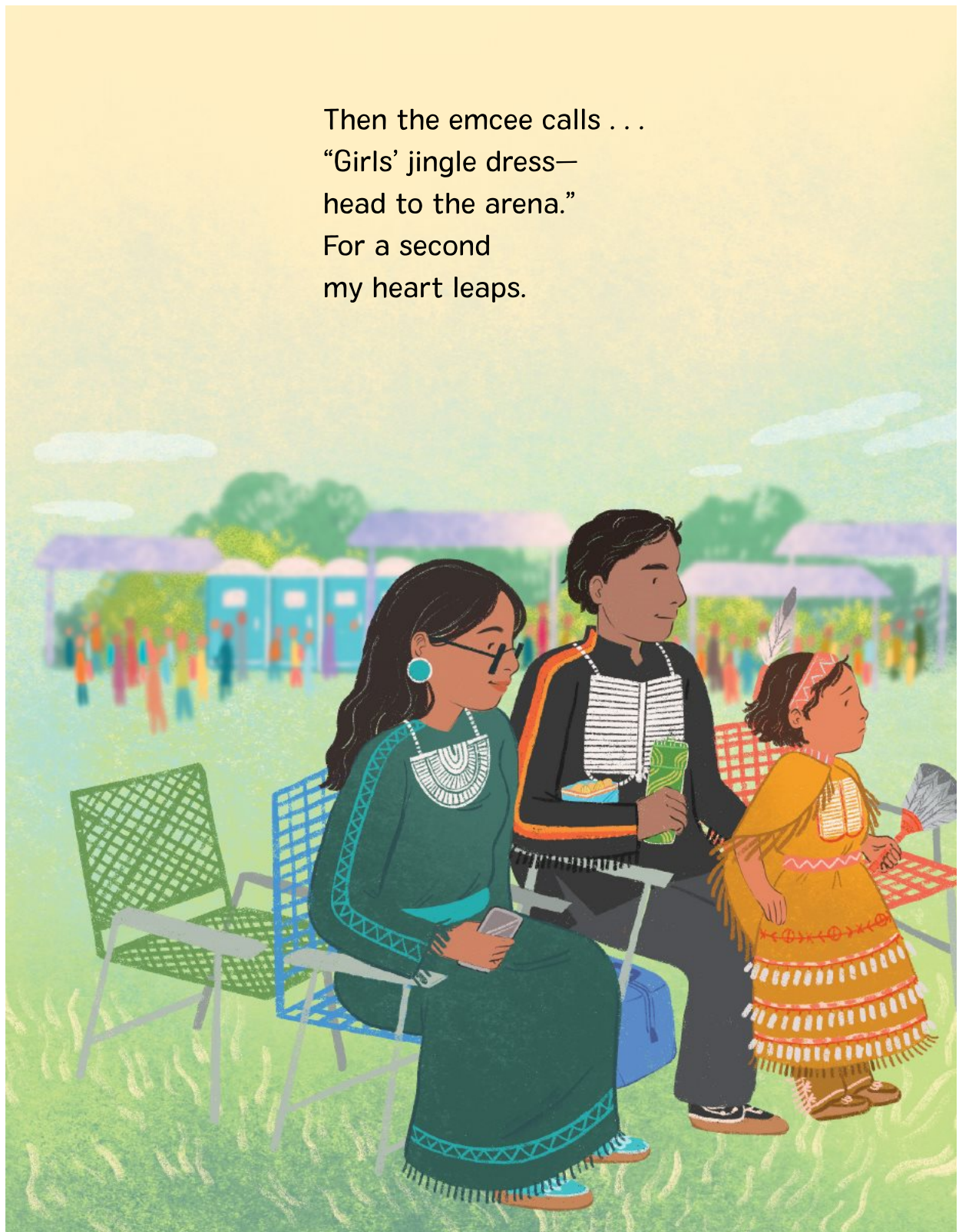
I lean against Daddy
and watch the competitions.
Traditional dancers move
and draw me in
to their story.
Fancy dancers twirl
and ribbons whirl.



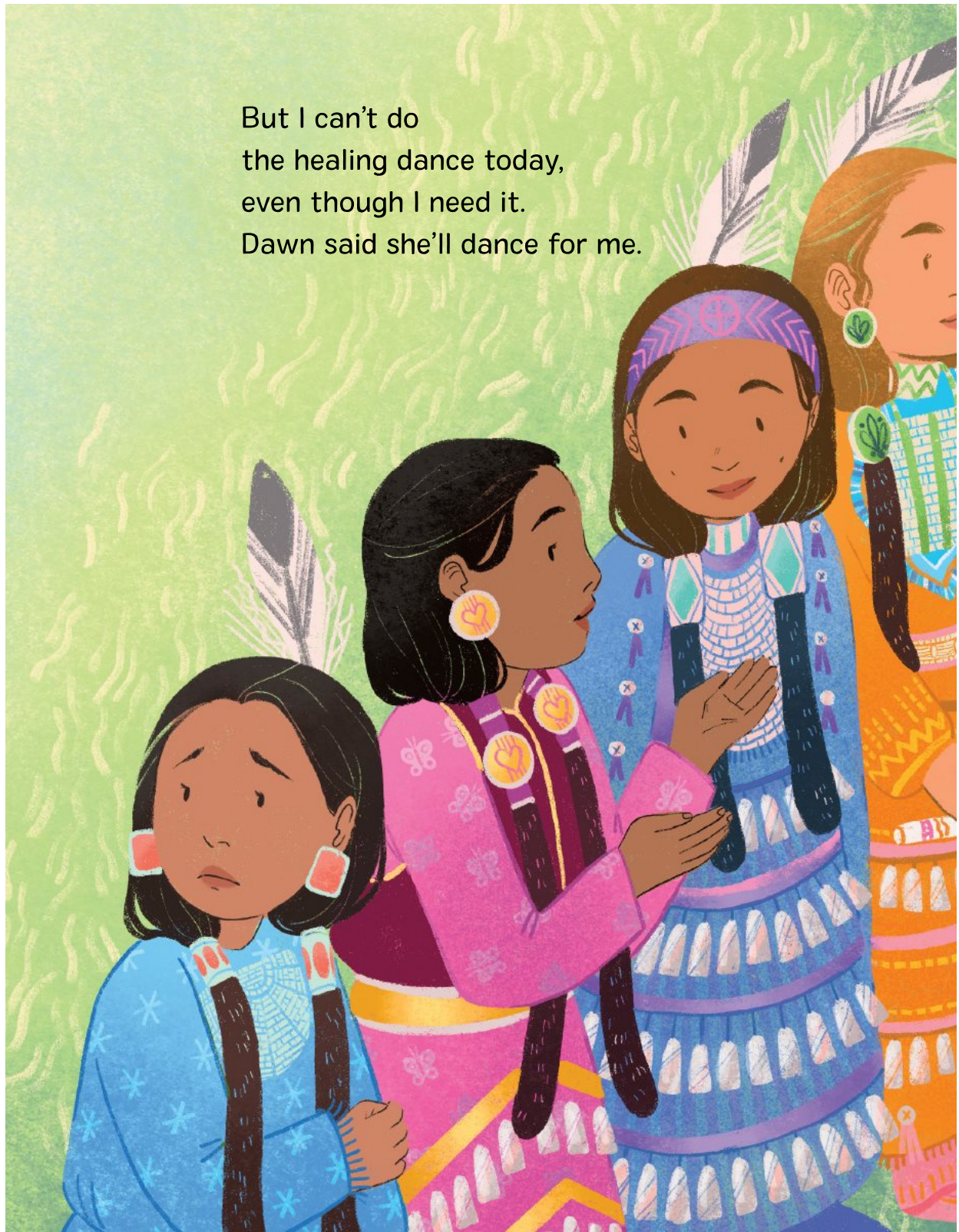


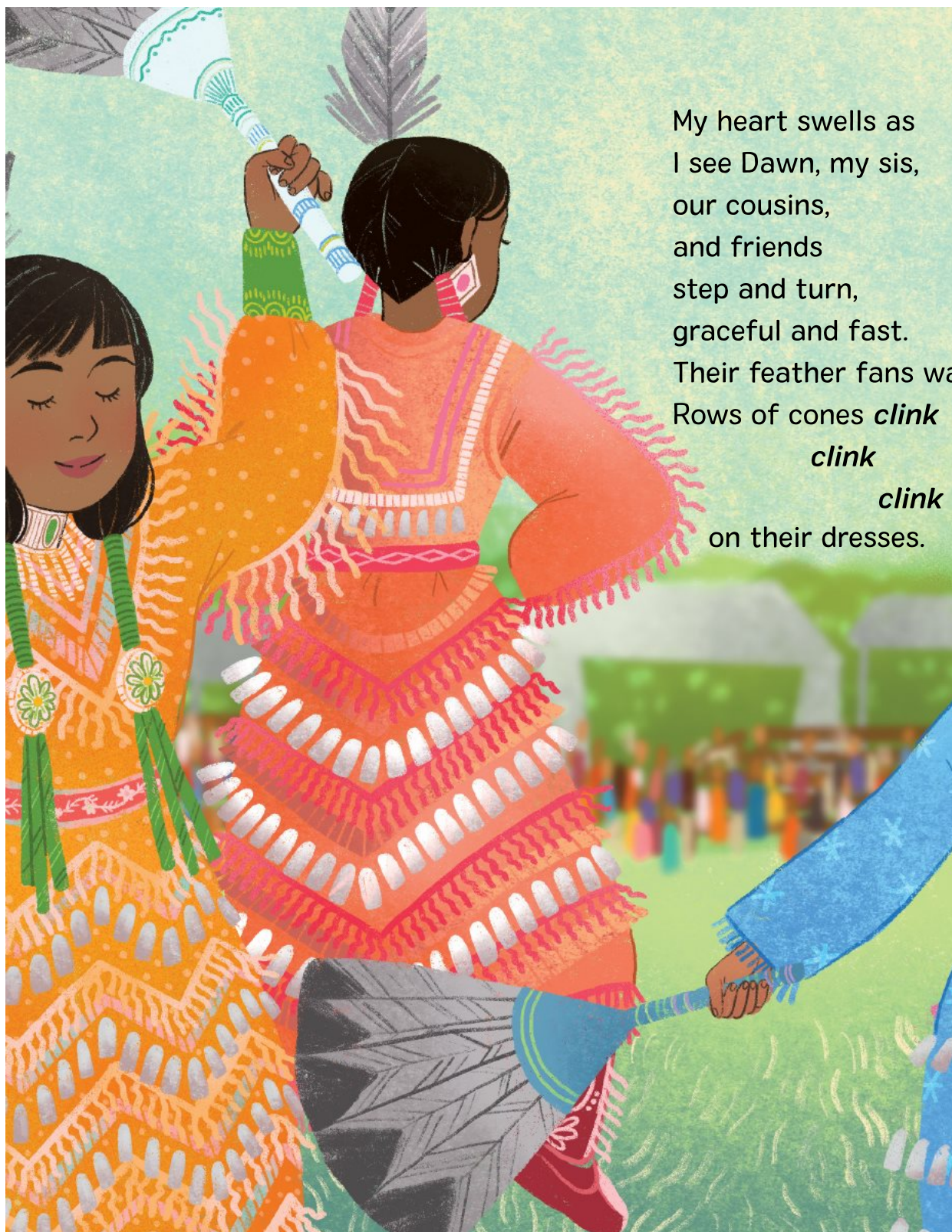
Graceful grass dancers
and weave themselves
around the circle.
The drum starts it.

Then the emcee calls . . .
“Girls’ jingle dress—
head to the arena.”
For a second
my heart leaps.



But I can't do
the healing dance today,
even though I need it.
Dawn said she'll dance for me.





My heart swells as
I see Dawn, my sis,
our cousins,
and friends
step and turn,
graceful and fast.
Their feather fans wa
Rows of cones *clink*
clink
clink
on their dresses.



I sit up tall as they come close.
Judges move around
the powwow arena
and record scores . . .
but the girls don't dance
for the judges.

They dance for
the Creator,
the ancestors,
their families,
and everyone's
including mine



BAH-dum.

BAH-dum.

BAH-dum.

BAH-dum.

I stand.

I open my heart.

I feel the drum fully now.

Then I know . . .



I will join them at
the next powwow.

I *will* dance again.





Information About Powwows

Powwow: Powwows are celebrations of dance, song, culture, and community, mostly originating from the warrior societies of the Ponca and Omaha tribes on the northern and southern plains of North America. Native Nations, universities, and nonprofits across the United States and Canada host powwows year-round. They last from one to four days and are held outdoors as well as inside large gymnasiums or meeting spaces. Some powwows feature competitions like the one in this story, where dancers compete for cash prizes. Others are traditional. Some are held to honor a specific person, celebrate special events like graduations, or provide a service, such as free health screenings for attendees. Everyone is welcome at a powwow and is expected to follow the event etiquette.

Arena: The designated area for dancing at a powwow, blessed prior to the event, is called an arena. It includes



the emcee's table, drum groups, and seating for dancers and their families. Spectators sit beyond this area. Once an arena is blessed, it is a sacred place during the event. One can only enter it to dance: no walking, running, or cutting across to the other side is allowed. No disruptive behavior, alcohol or drug use, or bad language is permitted within it. Outside the dance arena, vendors sell food, jewelry, artwork, and clothing.

Emcee: The emcee is the host who welcomes dancers, drum groups, and spectators to the powwow program moving forward. This person announces upcoming dances or competitions, shares traditions, and tells stories—often to entertain the crowd. The emcee enforces event etiquette for spectators, including rules about a dancer's regalia (traditional outfit is required, and modern clothing is not allowed, and when and where recording devices are allowed).

Arena Director: This person organizes the event, selects judges for Grand Entry, and maintains order in the dance area throughout the powwow.

Grand Entry: This occurs when all dancers enter the arena by age and style of dance (e.g., traditional, fancy, grass, and jingle dress). The audience stands, and men are expected to remain silent. The host drum group sings the Grand Entry song, followed by other drum groups offering honor songs and veterans' or victory songs. Dancers called the Head Man and Head Woman lead the procession. Veterans and active military members present the flags. The eagle staff is followed by flags from Native Nations, state, national, and often the POW (Prisoners of War / Missing in Action) flags. The rest of the dancers in the arena line up oldest to youngest by dance style. The emcee announces the Grand Entry, and the dancers enter the arena in a line, wearing their regalia, grass, and jingle dress.



Host Drums and Drum Groups: These are groups of men who offer the dance music by sitting around a large drum, beating it with long sticks and singing a variety of traditional songs and vocables (song words that have no translated meaning, such as eh-yah or fa-la-la). The powwow activity revolves around their music. There is at least one drum at every powwow, but usually there are several. The emcee announces which drum group will perform each song at the powwow.

Dances: The dances at a powwow rely on the drumbeat, which dictates the beginning and end of the song and the pacing that dancers must follow. Intertribals are non-contest dances in which everyone can participate. They are led by the Head Man and Head Woman. Male traditional dancers' movements tell stories about traditional hunts or battles, while women represent their family and tribe through dignified steps. Fancy dances display a man's or woman's physical stamina to perform complex steps to the drum's quick beat. Grass dancers focus on maintaining balance as each side of the body mimics the other through intricate footwork and swaying torso.

Jingle Dress Dance: Rows of tiny jingles or bells dangle from the dancer's dress against one another as she moves. Dancers' feet must always remain in contact with the ground while dancing. The dance is often considered a healing ceremony. Dancers may privately receive healing from others at the powwow and bring home a family member when they dance.

The jingle dress dance originated in the Ojibwe healing ceremony in the Great Lakes region of North America toward the end of the 19th century, a time when a flu epidemic raged worldwide. Many people died, and the dance was created to help the young people recover from the illness.



involve dancing beyond the Ojibwe tradition. The dance eventually spread to other tribes and led to the present-day practice at powwows. During the COVID-19 pandemic, jingle dress dancing was held online across Canada and the United States, allowing people to participate from their homes. Many people affected by the terrible disease have found healing through the dance.

Author's Note

I attended my first powwow in college and learned to cook big, fluffy frybread to sell for the Native student group fundraiser. Neither powwow nor frybread are traditional to my tribe, the Cherokee Nation. But I love the community that powwows foster among tribes and how non-Native people are invited to attend to learn more about contemporary Indigenous cultures.



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